1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
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beauty of Vao. Here, facing the channel, on the island's south-western shore, is the lovely beach called Kowu,[1] forming a long shallow bay, bounded on its north-western extremity by a wide reef. If we have the good fortune to arrive not too early in the morning, before the exodus to the mainland has begun, we may see no fewer than eighty canoes ranged side by side, following the curve of the beach, high up on the sand, out of reach of the tide. Slowly the natives come down, the men with their guns bought from white traders, without which they never move off the island, the women with baskets, their babies on their backs, the children playing and occasionally helping.

After much talk and laughter, each family group will separately carry or drag its canoe down to the sea, and soon a fleet of perhaps fifty canoes will be crossing the channel, each heading for its own landing-place on the mainland opposite. If the wind is favourable, sails made of pandanus strips dyed red, plaited by the women and sewn together by the men, are hoisted, each shaped like an inverted triangle.[2] If there is no wind, or if it is in the wrong quarter, paddles alone must do the work, and the gay cries of the paddlers echo over the sea.

WALK THROUGH THE VILLAGE DANCING-GROUNDS

Men's paths and women's paths. The sacred way.

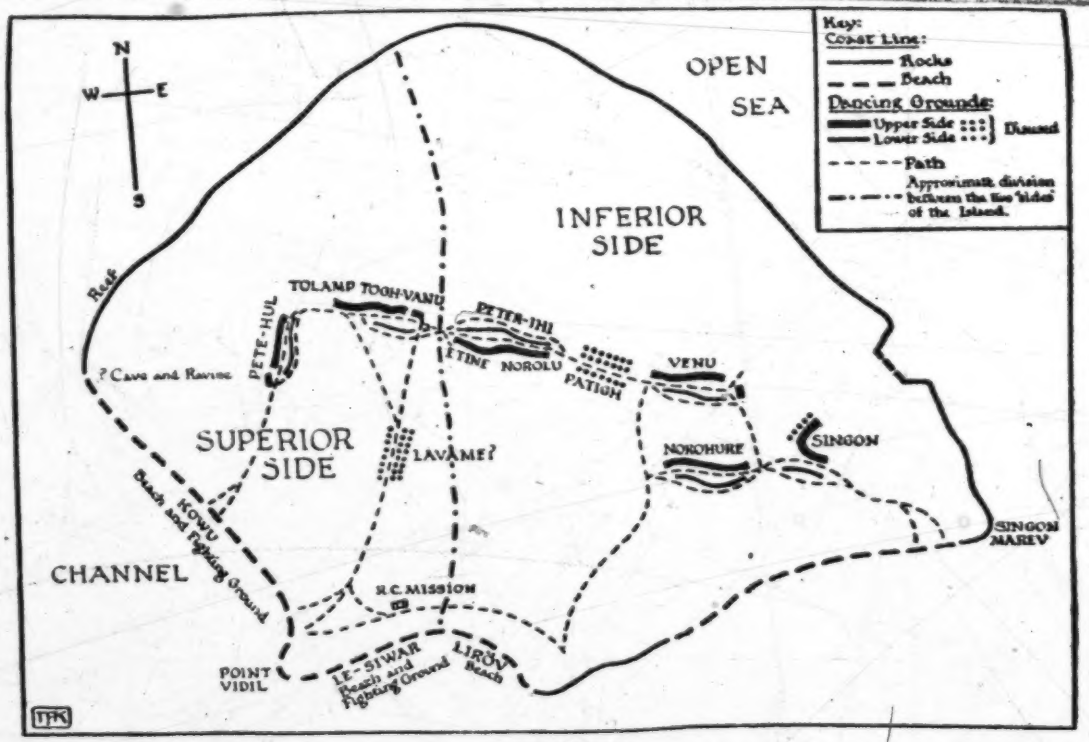
If, having watched this pleasing scene, we now turn towards the interior of the island, we find the choice of two paths. Perhaps a few stray natives are still coming down to the shore. Of these we notice that the men with confident air take one, while the women, more modest with their load of baskets, take the other. At the spot where the men come out on to the shore there is a wall of stones[3] lining the path, which has been consecrated by the sacrifice of a large number of tusked boars. This marks the shoreward end of the great sacred way that leads from one end of the island to the other. The stone wall itself and the boars sacrificed on it indicate among other things that this section of the way is taboo to women and to male children who have not yet taken the first step in their formal religious life by themselves sacrificing their first boars.

This way leads upwards towards the centre of the island. About thirty yards from its abutment on the shore it is joined by the women's path, and from here onward it may be used by women as well as men, since no further sanctified monuments lie on this part of the way. On approaching the first village dancing-ground, it divides once more, the

[1] Godefroy (1, 1933, p. 30), following his predecessor, Père Jamond, supposes this word to be derived from the English word "cove," and tells a circumstantial story to prove it. This is a false derivation. It is a native name and occurs in song-language as *ke-u*.

[2] See p. 460.

[3] I did not record the name for this wall on Vao. In Atchin it is *na-uor*.



MAP III

Sketch-map of Vao marking the position of the six village dancing-grounds and the division of the island into two asymmetrical Sides, the Superior Side containing the double-village of Pete-hul–Togh-vanu (as well as the refugee community of Tolamp), and the Inferior Side the two double-villages of Peter-ihi–Venu and Singon–Norohure. The map also indicates the position of the main beaches and of the paths leading to them, with the exception of that leading from Peter-ihi, which was not recorded.

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main way broadening out to become the dancing-ground itself, of which the sanctity is proclaimed by the dolmens and monoliths that line its sides, the women's path going parallel to it behind what is termed the "Lower" Side. Once past the dancing-ground, the women's path again joins the great way, which then proceeds to the next village dancing-ground, where it once more divides. In this way the men's path traverses all the main dancing-grounds on the island, each of which has in addition its own way down to its own beach, divided at the shoreward end into a men's path sanctified by the presence of a stone wall on which sacrifices have been performed, and a women's path marked only by the track which they have themselves made.

Dancing-ground of Pete-hul.

If we now follow the way inshore from Kowu we find ourselves in a minute valley, the ground gently rising on either side. After a minute or two fences appear, indicating the proximity of houses. A little further on the path widens, on the left a great banyan tree raises its mighty branches from which innumerable aerial roots redescend into the ground, and we find ourselves in the midst of an arena which is the dancing-ground of the chief village of Pete-hul. This arena is scooped out of the head of the shallow valley we have been following, which here widens, and then closes again. The tiny declivity would be almost unnoticeable were it not for the hand of man that had converted it into a place of unforgettable memory.

The whole surface of the ground with its mixture of volcanic dust is scrupulously weeded, and provides an incomparably soft yet firm and resilient medium for processional and other dances. Both sides of the dancing-ground are lined with the stone monuments set up during successive Maki rites, but these sides differ in that the monuments on the left, or what in native terminology is called the "Upper" Side, are incomparably the more magnificent. Opposed to these are the comparatively insignificant stones lining the "Lower" Side behind which runs the path taken by the women, who, as stated, may not set foot on the dancing-ground proper except on stated occasions. In the lay-out of any such ground, if the land rises on either side this will invariably be chosen as the "Upper" Side, thus demonstrating the correlation between physical and spiritual height, which is a marked feature of all New Hebridean ritual. The terms "upper" and "lower" are primarily of a social and spiritual nature, and it is on the Upper Side that the chief sacrifices are made by men of high rank, those on the Lower Side being carried out only by young men and boys who have not yet, through sacrifice of the nobler grades of tusked boar, completely established their independence from the uninitiated women whose path lies immediately behind it. For men dominate society, and only those men who have performed the highest sacrifice have full access to the spirit world of the

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from which paths go in all directions to the various dwelling enclosures. The great way now makes a right-angle turn towards the east. We are now on the low flat summit of the island. Following this road, in a few minutes we find ourselves in a new dancing-ground, half as long again as that of Pete-hul, giving a broad sense the other lacks, but at the same time being less compact, since there is here no natural arena. This is in fact two dancing-grounds joined end to end. In order to explain the existence of these dancing-grounds it is necessary to anticipate to some extent the chapters on Social Organisation by saying that, soon after the creation of Pete-hul, certain elements from this village seceded to found an offshoot village named Togh-vanu. These two together now form one patrilineally exogamous double-village called Pete-hul–Togh-vanu, which occupies the whole of the west Side of the Island. Each of these has its own dancing-ground, but that of the offshoot village Togh-vanu has been added to by the intrusion of an alien element, the survivors from Tolamp, one of the submerged islands already mentioned. These folk, having for some generations subsisted on the mainland, became finally so reduced in numbers that they could no longer support themselves as an independent community, and the last remnants of them, claiming kinship with the inhabitants of Togh-vanu, finally settled on Vao where the Togh-vanu folk gave them land and allowed them to build a new dancing-ground end to end with theirs.

Each of these two dancing-grounds has its own set of stone monuments, similar to those already seen at Pete-hul, and its own set of gongs. The westernmost, that which we enter first, belongs to Tolamp, the easternmost to Togh-vanu. Fig. 2 and Plates XIV, XV, XVII and XVIII illustrate some of the stone monuments belonging to Togh-vanu.

Towards the end of this dancing-ground a way leads down to the sea at the southern end of the beach called Kowu from which we have come, and which Togh-vanu is thus seen to share with its parent-village Pete-hul. This way also on approaching the beach divides into two, one path for the women and another for the men. We will not, however, go down this path, but will continue along the great way through the centre of the island which follows the slightly raised ridge that forms a minute watershed running across the island roughly from west to east.

Asymmetrical Division of the Island into Two unequal "Sides"

At the far end of Togh-vanu dancing-ground are more habitations, with paths radiating in all directions. At first sight these habitations, clustered together as they are, would appear to belong to one village. But they do not. Between them there runs an invisible line, here marked by a path but elsewhere by nothing, which divides off one side of Vao